Dispositional Self-Forgiveness,
Guilt- and Shame-Proneness, and the Roles of Motivational Tendencies

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Abstract

We investigated relationships between dispositional guilt-proneness, shame-proneness, and self-forgiveness. Drawing on motivational frameworks, we theorized that shame-proneness should be wholly problematic for self-forgiveness, whereas some aspects of guilt-proneness may be adaptive. Consistent with this framework, across both community ($n = 502$) and college ($n = 153$) samples, guilt-proneness was positively associated with trait self-forgiveness, whereas shame-proneness was negatively associated. Models decomposing guilt- and shame-proneness further supported our framework, with key results replicating across samples. For guilt-proneness, a tendency to make negative behavior evaluations predicted self-forgiveness, but only indirectly via motivational tendencies. For shame-proneness, a tendency to make negative self-evaluations predicted decreased self-forgiveness largely directly. Together, results frame guilt-proneness as potentially beneficial for self-forgiveness, but only to the extent that its motivational characteristics are activated; shame-proneness was broadly negatively related to self-forgiveness. Implications for theory and future research are discussed.

Keywords: shame-proneness, guilt-proneness, self-forgiveness

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1. Introduction

Although considerable attention has been given to individual differences in interpersonal forgiveness (e.g., Yang, Stoeber, & Wang, 2015), less is known about trait self-forgiveness, the ability to modulate reactions toward self-benevolence following wrongdoing (Mullet, Neto, & Rivière, 2005). Individual differences in self-forgiveness appear to be important for well-being: individuals who score highly on measures of self-forgiveness exhibit greater life satisfaction (Macaskill, 2012), report lower levels of depression (e.g., Sternthal, Williams, Musick, & Buck, 2010), and show enhanced physiological health (Wilson, Milosevic, Carroll, Hart, & Hibbard, 2008). Gaining a deeper understanding of dispositional self-forgiveness and relationships with other personality traits is thus an important research goal.

Two traits—dispositional guilt- and shame-proneness—may play important roles in self-forgiveness, though empirical evidence is both limited and mixed. In the present research, we offer a conceptual framework outlining their relationships, then examine these relationships empirically. Drawing on motivational models of guilt- and shame-proneness (e.g., Tangney, Stuewig, & Mashek, 2007), we suggest that shame-proneness should be broadly problematic for self-forgiveness, whereas motivational characteristics of guilt-proneness may be beneficial. Decomposing guilt- and shame-proneness, we suggest that individuals who are prone to make negative *behavior* evaluations may be more self-forgiving indirectly, due to increased repair and reduced withdrawal tendencies (guilt-prone pattern), whereas individuals who are prone to make more negative *self* evaluations may be less self-forgiving both directly and indirectly via motivational pathways (shame-prone pattern).

1.1. Self-Forgiveness

Dispositional self-forgiveness (i.e., self-forgiving tendencies, self-forgivingness; Hill & Allemand, 2010; Mullet et al., 2005) is the ability to “abandon self-resentment in the face of one’s own acknowledged objective wrong, while fostering compassion, generosity, and love toward oneself” (Enright & The Human Development Study Group, 1996, p. 116; see Hall & Fincham, 2005). It is marked by the tendency to respond to personal transgressions, wrongdoings, or shortcomings with self-benevolence instead of self-punitiveness and to shift responses away from self-punishment (Maltby, Macaskill, & Day, 2001) and is distinct from interpersonal forgivingness (Ross, Hertenstein, & Wrobel, 2007). It is associated with personality traits such as conscientiousness and emotional stability (Ross, Kendall, Matters, Wrobel, & Rye, 2004), cognitive flexibility (Thompson et al., 2005), and a number of positive health outcomes (e.g., Wilson et al., 2008). However, relatively little research has examined links between self-forgiveness and shame- and guilt-proneness.

1.2. Guilt- and Shame- Proneness

We draw upon Tangney and colleagues’ appraisal/motivational model of guilt- and shame-proneness (Cohen, Wolf, Panter, & Insko, 2011; Tangney & Dearing, 2002), which defines guilt- and shame-proneness as distinct negative response styles. In this framework, guilt-proneness is characterized by tendency to appraise *behaviors* negatively, whereas shame-proneness characterized by a tendency to appraise the *self* negatively in eliciting contexts¹ (Tangney & Dearing, 2002; Niedenthal, Tangney, & Gavanski, 1994; Tangney, Miller, Flicker,

¹ The present framework (guilt as behavior focus, shame as self focus; Lewis, 1971) is currently the primary model of guilt- and shame-proneness in the personality literature (e.g., Cohen et al., 2011). However, some also use “guilt” and “shame” differently, for example, to distinguish between private vs. public self-conscious affect (e.g., Ausubel, 1955; Smith, Webster, Parrott, & Eyre, 2002). This latter usage carries different meanings and implications from the behavior/self distinction used here.

& Barlow, 1996; Tangney et al., 2007; Tracy & Robins, 2006). As argued by Tangney et al. (2007), this difference is subtle but important, reflecting the degree to which the self and/or behaviors are seen as the source of transgressions. Whereas guilt-prone individuals think, 'I did a bad thing,' shame-prone individuals think, 'I am a bad person' (Tangney & Dearing, 2002).

These appraisal differences lead shame- and guilt-proneness to support different motivational tendencies (Tangney & Dearing, 2002; Tangney et al., 2007). The behavior-focus of guilt-proneness is theorized to motivate approach and repair responses (Tangney & Dearing, 2002). Behavioral attributions for transgressions (internal, unstable, controllable; Tracy & Robins, 2006) are more approach motivating than self-attributions (internal, stable, uncontrollable; Tracy & Robins, 2006; see Weiner, 1985). Consistent with this, guilt-prone individuals are more likely to apologize for transgressions (e.g., Howell, Turowski, & Buro, 2012), approach offenses (Cohen et al., 2011), and bring offending behaviors in line with standards (Tangney, Stuewig, & Martinez, 2014). Conversely, shame is associated with offenders' attempts to protect self-images (Tangney & Dearing, 2002). This includes avoidance (e.g., withdrawal, secrecy; DeLong & Kahn, 2014; Yi, 2012) as well as behavior change (but only when doing so mitigates self-image threat; de Hooge, Zeelenberg, & Breugelmans, 2010). We suggest that these features may play important roles in relationships with self-forgiveness.

Research has repeatedly found shame-proneness to be maladaptive (Tangney & Dearing, 2002; Woien, Ernst, Patock-Peckham, & Nagoshi, 2003). In contrast, when controlling for shame, guilt-proneness is generally weakly related or unrelated to negative outcomes such as depression, (Kim, Thibodeau, & Jorgensen, 2011) anger and hostility (Tangney, Wagner, Fletcher, & Gramzow, 1992) and predictive of some positive outcomes, such as perspective-taking (Howell et al., 2012) and prosocial conflict style (Tangney et al., 1996). Some have

speculated that the adaptive outcomes of guilt-proneness may be due to motivational characteristics that stem from its behavioral focus (e.g., Giner-Sorolla, Piazza, & Espinosa, 2011), although this has received little attention in the case of self-forgiveness.

More recently, researchers have developed measures that distinguish empirically between appraisal and motivational aspects of guilt- and shame-proneness. Specifically, Cohen et al. (2011) demonstrated that guilt-proneness can be separated into negative behavior evaluations (NBEs) and repair tendencies. NBEs include the tendency to view behaviors negatively and experience negative behavior-focused affect, whereas repair includes the tendency to un-do or change offending behaviors. Similarly, shame-proneness can be separated into negative self evaluations (NSE) and withdrawal tendencies. NSEs include a tendency to view the self negatively in wrongdoing contexts and experience negative self-focused affect, whereas withdrawal includes the tendency to avoid victims and offense contexts. Decomposing guilt- and shame-proneness in this way reveals relationships among all four components. Specifically, guilt NBEs are uniquely associated with both increased repair and decreased withdrawal, and shame NSEs are uniquely associated with increased withdrawal and at times with increased repair (Cohen et al., 2011). This approach allows for greater specificity than the two-dimension approach (although both are widely used) and may help to shed light on relationships between self-forgiveness and guilt- and shame-proneness.

1.3. Role of Guilt-Proneness in Self-Forgiveness

One might expect the motivational ‘approach-and-repair’ characteristics of guilt-proneness to be beneficial to self-forgiveness. Repair responses are important facilitators of self-forgiveness, restoring equity following transgressions and helping individuals feel morally permitted to self-forgive (Carpenter, Carlisle, & Tsang, 2014). A tendency to approach offenses,

rather than avoiding them, may similarly help offenders find resolution and achieve self-forgiveness (Worthington, 2006). Given these potential benefits of guilt-proneness, we predict a positive unique link between overall guilt-proneness and self-forgiveness. Decomposing guilt-proneness into its components, we expect this link to be largely a function of guilt-proneness's motivational features. Regarding indirect effects, we expect guilt NBEs to positively predict approach and repair tendencies (Cohen et al, 2011; Tangney et al., 2007), which in turn predict a more self-forgiving disposition. This mediational pattern is depicted in Figure 1.

In contrast, conflicting predictions can be made regarding the direct link between guilt NBEs and self-forgiveness. As guilt NBEs represent a negatively valenced response to offending behaviors, they may negatively predict self-forgiveness (Hall & Fincham, 2005). On the other hand, Tangney and Dearing (2002) suggested that a negative behavior focus may not be sufficient, on its own, to drive negative self-directed responses. At the same time, one might expect a tendency to focus on problematic behaviors to drive attention and internal repair efforts (e.g., effortful, behavior-focused cognition; Fisher & Exline, 2006) that could enhance self-forgiveness. As we see the merits of both positions, we made no a priori prediction about the direct link between NBEs and self-forgiveness in the present research.

Empirical research on the relationship between guilt-proneness and self-forgiveness is limited and conflicted. In a clinical sample, McGaffin et al. (2013) found a positive unique link between overall guilt-proneness and self-forgiveness, a finding that is consistent with the theoretical perspectives outlined above. Still, in undergraduate samples, Ranganathan and Todorov (2010) did not find a unique association, and Strelan (2007) found a small negative link. Additional research would help to clarify this relationship, particularly research that teases apart the roles of appraisal (NBEs) and motivations.

Two of the previously mentioned studies did examine the motivational variable of repair. Both Ranganathan and Todorov (2010) and McGaffin et al. (2013) failed to find support for the mediating role of conciliatory repair tendencies (i.e., apology) between guilt-proneness and self-forgiveness. The present study hopes to overcome some limitations that may have obscured its mediating role. First, these studies examined *overall* guilt-proneness (not NBEs) as the initial predictor. As noted by Giner-Sorolla et al. (2011), overall guilt-proneness already includes repair as a central and defining feature². Consequently, there exists considerable overlap between repair measures (mediators) and overall guilt-proneness measures (predictor), which is undesirable in mediation contexts and can obscure findings (Hayes, 2013). We avoid this by using measures of guilt-proneness specifically designed to tease apart these facets, allowing their separate roles to be tested. Second, these studies focused only on social forms of repair (e.g., apology), whereas theorists emphasize both apology and behavior change as aspects of repair (Tangney & Dearing, 2002). We sought to examine both forms. Finally, given the inconsistencies in past research, we sought to recruit larger samples than previous studies.

1.4. Role of Shame-Proneness in Self-Forgiveness

Theorists have repeatedly argued that shame is problematic for self-forgiveness (Enright et al., 1996; Hall & Fincham, 2005). Empirical research has supported these assertions: overall shame-proneness is negatively linked to self-forgiveness (McGaffin et al., 2013; Ranganathan & Todorov, 2010; Strelan, 2007). However, research has not yet considered the role of motivational response tendencies in this relationship. Decomposing shame-proneness, we expect

² For example, the TOSCA-3 measure of guilt-proneness (Tangney, Wagner, & Gramzow, 2000) includes phrases such as “you would apologize” in most items. Although this may capture the overall dimension adequately, it is problematic when one wishes to examine the role of repair separately (i.e., as in a mediation analysis). The Cohen et al. (2011) measure was developed in part to avoid such issues.

NSEs to deter self-forgiveness directly (as painful self-focused cognitions facilitate negative self-directed reactions) and indirectly (as people respond to NSEs by withdrawing). However, given that shame has been inconsistently associated with both decreased (Howell et al., 2012) and increased (Cohen et al., 2011; de Hooge et al., 2010) repair-type responses, it is unclear whether repair may play a clear mediating role. The mediational prediction is depicted in Figure 1.

1.5. The Present Research

We examine relationships between dispositional guilt-proneness, shame-proneness, and self-forgiveness. Given the reparative nature of guilt-proneness, we expected a positive link between self-forgiveness and overall guilt-proneness and a negative link with overall shame-proneness. However, we did not expect all elements of these dimensions to act uniformly (Figure 1). For guilt-proneness, we expected negative behavior evaluations (NBEs) to predict greater self-forgiveness indirectly, mediated by increased repair and decreased withdrawal tendencies (guilt-prone pattern; Figure 1). We had no a priori prediction about the direct NBE-self-forgiveness link. For shame-proneness, we expected negative self evaluations (NSEs) to predict decreased self-forgiveness directly and indirectly as mediated by motivational tendencies (shame-prone pattern; Figure 1).

2. Method

We tested our predictions across two samples. Both college students (Sample 1) and Amazon Mechanical Turk participants (Sample 2) completed individual-difference measures of self-forgiveness and guilt- and shame-proneness.

2.1. Participants

2.1.1. Sample 1

Sample 1 consisted of 153 psychology undergraduate students (116 women, 37 men),

participating as part of a larger study on personality and religion; all measures relevant to the current hypotheses are presented here. Participants from Sample 1 were recruited from a mid-sized, private university in the southwestern United States who completed the study online in exchange for partial course credit. Participants self-identified as Caucasian (56%), Hispanic / Latino (17%), Asian American (13%), African American (12%), and other ethnicities (2%). Data collection was terminated after two academic terms³.

2.1.2. Sample 2

Following analysis of Sample 1, we sought to test our predictions with a larger and more inclusive independent sample. Sample 2 consisted of 502 participants (288 women, 214 men) recruited through Amazon's Mechanical Turk (www.mturk.com; Paolacci & Chandler, 2014) and was designed to replicate Sample 1 results. MTurk has been found to be a source of reliable and valid data for psychological and personality research (Behrend, Sharek, Meade, & Wiebe, 2011; Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011; e.g., Kramer, Rodriguez, & Kertz, 2015). Although MTurk does not provide national random samples, MTurk samples tend to be more diverse and representative than college samples (Behrend et al., 2011; Casler, Bickel, & Hackett, 2013). Ages in our MTurk sample ranged from 18 to 82 ($M = 35.55$, $SD = 12.99$). Participants were located across 47 states and the District of Columbia. Participants self-identified as Caucasian (79%), African American (9%), Asian American (8%), Hispanic / Latino (7%), and other ethnicities (2%).⁴ Following established guidelines, participation was restricted to individuals in the United States who had no greater than a 5% MTurk rejection rate (Feitosa, Joseph, & Newman, 2015; Peer, Vosgerau, & Acquisti, 2013). This larger sample was recruited to provide

³ Sample 1 also included a small religious priming manipulation unrelated to the present hypotheses. The priming manipulation was ineffective, did not impact any measures (all p 's > .35), and was not considered further.

⁴ A small minority (5%) of participants self-identified with more than one ethnicity.

increased power ($\approx .80$) for testing the smaller slopes observed in Sample 1 (e.g., links with withdrawal). Participants received \$0.75 for participation.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Self-Forgiveness

Self-forgiveness in both samples was assessed using the Heartland Forgiveness Scale – Self (HFS; Thompson et al., 2005). The HFS is the most widely used measure of dispositional self-forgiveness, consisting of 6 items scored on a 7-point scale. Items assess the degree to which individuals do (or do not) respond forgivingly toward the self for perceived wrongdoings (e.g., “I hold grudges against myself for negative things I’ve done”; 1 = *Almost always false of me*, 7 = *Almost always true of me*; α s = .81 and .88 for Samples 1 and 2, respectively).

2.2.2. Test of Self-Conscious Affect

Overall guilt- and shame-proneness were assessed in both samples using the Test of Self-Conscious Affect-3 (TOSCA-3; Tangney et al., 2000). The TOSCA shame and guilt scales are the most widely used measures of dispositional guilt- and shame-proneness. The TOSCA-3 contains scenarios with a range of potential responses. Participants read these scenarios and rate the likelihood of enacting each hypothetical response using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *Not likely*, 5 = *Very Likely*). Given that we were only interested in guilt and shame, participants only completed the 11 negative scenarios, as suggested by Tangney and Dearing (2002). The guilt-proneness scale consists of 11 items indicative of a tendency to respond with guilt (e.g., “You’d feel bad you hadn’t been more alert”; “You would feel unhappy and eager to correct the situation”; α s = .82, .84). The shame-proneness subscale consisted of 11 items indicative of a tendency to respond with shame (e.g., “You would feel incompetent”; α s = .78, .78).

2.2.3. Guilt- and Shame-Proneness Scale

Participants in both samples also completed the Guilt- and Shame-Proneness scale (GASP; Cohen et al., 2011), which decomposes guilt- and shame-proneness each into appraisal and motivational components. Participants read 16 scenarios and rated the likelihood of different responses on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *Very unlikely*, 7 = *Very likely*).

The negative self evaluations (NSEs) subscale consists of four items indicating a tendency to negatively appraise the *self* in transgression contexts (e.g., “What is the likelihood that this would make you would feel like a bad person?”; α s = .76, .79). The negative behavior evaluations (NBEs) subscale consists of four items indicating a tendency to negatively appraise *behaviors* in transgression contexts (e.g., “What is the likelihood that you would feel that the way you acted was pathetic?”; α s = .69, .75). The withdrawal subscale consists of four items indicating a tendency to respond by avoiding one’s offenses (e.g., “What is the likelihood that you would avoid the guests until they leave?”; α s = .69, .65). The repair subscale consists of four items indicating a tendency to respond by correcting offending behavior (e.g., “What is the likelihood that this would lead you to become more responsible about attending school?”; α s = .67, .73).

2.2.4. Apology (Sample 1 only)

The repair subscale of the GASP focuses only on behavior change, yet self-forgiveness theorists emphasize social forms of repair as well (e.g., amends, apology; Hall & Fincham, 2005). To include such conciliatory responses, participants in Sample 1 also completed the Proclivity to Apologize Measure (PAM; Howell, Dopko, Turowski, & Buro, 2011). The PAM consists of eight items scored on a 7-point Likert scale that assess a tendency to avoid apologizing (1 = *Strong disagreement*, 7 = *Strong agreement*; e.g., “My continued anger often

gets in the way of me apologizing”, $\alpha = .89$). To create consistency with the GASP repair scale, the PAM was scored such that higher scores indicated a *greater* tendency to make amends.

2.2.5. Conciliatory Behavior (Sample 2 only)

Sample 2 included a scale similar to the PAM, the Conciliatory Behavior Scale (Rangganadhan & Todorov, 2010), which measures tendencies to apologize, make amends, and provide restitution to hurt parties. The scale is slightly broader than the PAM, including both apology and restitution-type content (Hall & Fincham, 2005). The scale consists of seven items administered on a 7-point Likert scale (e.g., “When I have hurt or offended someone, I will try to make the situation right”; 1 = *Almost always false of me*, 7 = *Almost always true of me*; $\alpha = .89$).

3. Results

3.1. Sample 1

Descriptive statistics and reliabilities for Sample 1 are given in Table 1. Mediation analyses were performed using the PROCESS macro for SPSS (v. 2.13, Model 4; Hayes, 2013). PROCESS allows researchers to measure the mediated portion of a relationship and calculates a bias-corrected and accelerated bootstrapped confidence interval for the size of the mediated effect. Significant mediation is indicated by confidence intervals that do not contain zero. To yield standardized paths, all variables were z-scored prior to mediation analyses. All participants were retained for analyses.

3.1.1. Overall Guilt- and Shame-Proneness

We first examined overall guilt- and shame-proneness as assessed by the TOSCA-3. Because guilt- and shame-proneness are often positively correlated, and can operate as mutual suppressors (Paulhus, Robins, Trzesniewski, & Tracy, 2004), unique relationships with dependent variables are often examined via regression or partial correlation to avoid confounding

shame and guilt. We present regression-based results here; zero-order correlations may be found in Table 1.

A regression analysis examining simultaneous unique contributions from overall guilt- and shame- explained significant variance in self-forgiveness, $R^2 = .27$, $F(2, 150) = 27.78$, $p < .001$. Consistent with predictions, guilt-proneness predicted increased self-forgiveness, $\beta_{\text{guilt}} = .32$, $p < .001$, and shame-proneness predicted decreased self-forgiveness $\beta_{\text{shame}} = -.48$, $p < .001$. Zero-order correlations revealed a similar pattern (Table 1).

For comparison purposes, we examined whether these results could be replicated with the GASP if it were scored similarly (i.e., collapsed into ‘shame’ and ‘guilt’ scales as is sometimes done; e.g., Ent & Baumeister, 2015). Analyses using these composite scores produced results similar to those above, $R^2 = .16$, $F(2, 150) = 14.69$, $p < .001$, with guilt-proneness predicting increased self-forgiveness, $\beta_{\text{guilt}} = .27$, $p < .001$, and shame-proneness predicting decreased self-forgiveness, $\beta_{\text{shame}} = -.40$, $p < .001$. Thus, when examined as overarching dimensions, guilt-proneness was positively associated with self-forgiveness and shame-proneness was negatively associated, regardless of the measure used. However, we expected a more nuanced pattern to emerge when dimensions were decomposed using the GASP.

3.1.2. Mediation Analyses

We next tested our mediational predictions using the GASP, which decomposes guilt- and shame-proneness into appraisal and motivational components. Results are given in Figure 2 (*italic coefficients*) and were broadly consistent with our theoretical model. As with the regression results above, analyses for guilt were performed controlling for shame and vice-versa (e.g., Howell et al., 2012, Ranggandhan & Todorov, 2010).

We examined guilt-proneness first (Figure 2). Self-forgiveness was not uniquely predicted by guilt NBEs, $\beta = .02, p = .86$. However, as expected, self-forgiveness was uniquely predicted by repair ($\beta = .21, p = .04$) and withdrawal ($\beta = -.31, p < .001$) motivations as measured by the GASP, although it was not uniquely predicted by the additional apology measure, $\beta = .02, p = .85$. Given that NBEs predicted increased repair, $\beta = .50, p < .001$, this resulted in significant mediation via repair, estimate = .10, 95% CI [.01, .25]. NBEs also predicted the apology measure, $\beta = .56, p < .001$, but given the relationship between apology and self-forgiveness, mediation via apology was not significant, estimate = .01, 95% CI [-.11, .11]. NBEs did not significantly predict decreased withdrawal, $\beta = -.13, p = .19$, and mediation via withdrawal was also not significant, estimate = .04, 95% CI [-.02, .11]. Thus, motivational features of guilt-proneness—particularly repair—were uniquely associated with higher dispositional levels of self-forgiveness. NBEs predicted self-forgiveness only indirectly to the degree that they predicted repair, consistent with our theoretical framework.

Mediation results for shame-proneness were examined next (Figure 2, *italics*). Links between NSEs and self-forgiveness appeared to be more direct than indirect. As expected, NSEs predicted decreased self-forgiveness directly, $\beta = -.19, p = .04$. Links between motivational features and self-forgiveness are described above. NSEs predicted increased repair, $\beta = .17, p = .02$, which resulted in a small positive mediating role for repair, estimate = .04, 95% CI [.003, .11]. NSEs did not significantly predict withdrawal, $\beta = .13, p = .16$, and mediation through withdrawal was not significant, estimate = -.04, 95% CI [-.12, .01]. NSEs also predicted decreased apology, $\beta = -.18, p = .04$, but no mediation was observed through apology, estimate = -.003, 95% CI [-.04, .04]. Thus, the link between NSEs and self-forgiveness appeared to be more direct than indirect.

3.2. Sample 2

Sample 1 provided initial support for our conceptual model, demonstrating a positive link between guilt-proneness and self-forgiveness and a negative link between shame-proneness and self-forgiveness. Sample 1 further clarified these relationships, demonstrating that repair (but not NBE) aspects of guilt-proneness predicted self-forgiveness and that the unique link between NBEs and self-forgiveness was largely indirect via repair. Finally, Sample 1 revealed that NSEs appeared to be more directly than indirectly related to self-forgiveness and suggested only weak roles for motivational tendencies in shame-proneness.

In Sample 2, we sought to re-examine these relationships using a larger and broader independent sample. This was important for two reasons. First, given the complexity of predictions and inconsistency in past research, we wanted to replicate key results from Sample 1. Second, given the effect sizes observed in Sample 1 and inconsistencies in past research, we sought to improve the reliability of results by recruit a considerably larger sample than has been historically used. For Sample 2, we also sought to increase generalizability beyond college students (who have been the focus of most self-forgiveness research to date) and thus we recruited a broader community sample. Finally, we wanted to re-examine the role of social forms of repair (e.g., apology, amends). The Howell et al. (2011) apology measure in Sample 1 focuses narrowly on reasons for withholding apology and was intended to supplement the GASP repair scale, which operationalizes repair only as behavior change. For Sample 2, we replaced the Howell et al. measure with a post-transgression repair measure used in past self-forgiveness research, which includes additional conciliatory behaviors (e.g., apology, amends, etc.), more consistent with self-forgiveness theory (Rangganadhan & Todorov, 2010; McGaffin et al., 2013).

3.2.1. Sample 2 Overall Guilt- and Shame-Proneness

Descriptive statistics for Sample 2 are presented in Table 2, with all participants retained for analyses. Results were largely consistent with Sample 1. A regression predicting self-forgiveness, $R^2 = .26$, $F(2, 499) = 87.46$, $p < .001$, revealed that overall guilt-proneness again predicted increased self-forgiveness, $\beta_{\text{guilt}} = .29$, $p < .001$, and overall shame-proneness again predicted decreased self-forgiveness $\beta_{\text{shame}} = -.50$, $p < .001$. Also as in Sample 1, the same pattern was observed with zero-order correlations (Table 2). This same pattern emerged with composite GASP scores as well, $R^2 = .17$, $F(2, 499) = 49.61$, $p < .001$, with guilt-proneness predicting greater self-forgiveness, $\beta_{\text{guilt}} = .30$, $p < .001$, and shame-proneness predicting lesser self-forgiveness, $\beta_{\text{shame}} = -.42$, $p < .001$. Thus, as in Sample 1, when guilt- and shame-proneness were examined as two overarching dimensions, guilt-proneness was positively associated with self-forgiveness, and shame-proneness was negatively associated with self-forgiveness.

3.2.2. Mediation Analyses

Mediation analyses were performed using the same procedure as in Sample 1. Results are shown in Figure 2 (bold coefficients) and were consistent with predictions. As in Sample 1, the direct relationship between guilt NBEs and self-forgiveness was not significant, $\beta = .06$, $p = .28$. However, self-forgiveness was uniquely predicted by all three motivational variables, including repair, $\beta = .21$, $p < .001$, withdrawal, $\beta = -.12$, $p = .004$, and conciliatory behavior, $\beta = .26$, $p < .001$. NBEs were also predictive of all three motivations, resulting in mediation through each. Specifically, NBEs predicted increased repair, $\beta = .47$, $p < .001$, resulting in significant mediation through repair, estimate = .10, 95% CI [.04, .16]. NBEs also predicted decreased withdrawal, $\beta = -.15$, $p = .006$, resulting in an indirect link via withdrawal, estimate = .02, 95% CI [.003, .05]. Finally, NBEs predicted increased conciliatory behavior, $\beta = .44$, $p < .001$, resulting in additional mediation via conciliatory behavior, estimate = .12, 95% CI [.07, .18].

Thus, as in Sample 1, NBEs did not predict self-forgiveness directly but did predict self-forgiveness indirectly via motivational tendencies. However, unlike Sample 1, we found evidence for all three mediational pathways in Sample 2.

Results for shame-proneness were largely consistent with those from Sample 1. Shame NSEs again predicted decreased self-forgiveness directly, $\beta = -.41, p < .001$. Also as in Sample 1, this link appeared to be more direct than indirect. NSEs again predicted increased repair, $\beta = .25, p < .001$, resulting in a positive indirect relationship mediated by repair, estimate = .05, 95% CI [.02, .10]. NSEs also predicted increased withdrawal, $\beta = .24, p < .001$, resulting in a negative mediated relationship via withdrawal, estimate = -.03, 95% CI [-.06, -.01]. NSEs did not predict conciliatory tendencies, $\beta = .05, p = .28$, and mediation via conciliatory behavior was not significant, estimate = .01, 95% CI [-.01, .05]. Thus, as in Sample 1, the relationship appeared to be more direct than indirect.

4. Discussion

The present results provide empirical support for our conceptual framework, and add clarity to the inconsistent literature on dispositional self-forgiveness, guilt-proneness, and shame-proneness. First, we observed robust links in both college and adult online samples between overall measures of guilt-and shame-proneness and self-forgiveness. Overall guilt-proneness was consistently uniquely associated with higher levels of self-forgiveness, and overall shame-proneness was consistently uniquely associated with lower levels of self-forgiveness. This pattern held using both overall TOSCA scores and composite scores from the GASP. Our guilt-proneness results align well with those found by McGaffin and colleagues (2013), but they stand in contrast to those found by Ranganathan and Todorov (2010) and Strelan (2007). We suspect

that one reason for the difference may be that we utilized larger samples than prior studies; Sample 2 was larger than all prior studies combined.

The present results go beyond past research and attempt to decompose the above relationships. Our results suggest that it would be a mistake to conclude that all aspects of guilt-proneness are uniformly related to self-forgiveness. Whereas motivational features of the guilt-proneness dimension (e.g., repair) were uniquely predictive of increased self-forgiveness, the tendency to negatively appraise behaviors (i.e., guilt NBEs; Cohen et al., 2011) was not. However, these motivational and appraisal components were related. Across both samples we observed a unique *indirect* relationship between guilt NBEs and self-forgiveness as mediated by motivational pathways. This was particularly evident in the larger Sample 2, in which mediation was observed uniquely through increased repair (behavior-change), increased conciliatory tendencies, and decreased withdrawal. Taken together, these results suggest that although *overall* guilt-proneness is positively related to self-forgiveness, this relationship may be driven chiefly by its motivational components. Such findings support Giner-Sorolla et al.'s (2011) suspicion that the motivational aspects of guilt-proneness may be its most adaptive characteristics.

A different pattern was observed for shame-proneness. As expected, shame NSEs exhibited robust negative links with self-forgiveness in both samples. However, contrary to our predictions, we saw little evidence that the negative link between NSEs and self-forgiveness was facilitated by motivations. The only link to consistently mediate across samples was a small positive one between NSEs and repair. In both samples, NSE-prone individuals exhibited elevated scores on the GASP repair measure, which assesses the tendency to respond by changing behavior (even when simultaneously reporting a desire to avoid victims). In neither sample were NSEs associated with social forms of repair, such as apology. The fact that behavior

change (which might hide a wrongful behavior) but not apology or conciliatory responding (which might reveal it) was consistently associated with NSEs further aligns with the theory that shame motivates behaviors that protect one's self-image (Tangney & Dearing, 2002) and is consistent with results reported by de Hooge et al. (2011) and Cohen et al. (2011). Still, the present results suggest that the link between NSEs and self-forgiveness is more direct than indirect, providing a contrast to the unique, indirect role of NBEs.

The results observed in the present study were broadly consistent with other findings in the guilt- and shame-proneness literatures. Tangney et al. (2014) reported that guilt-proneness was uniquely linked to decreased recidivism, whereas shame-proneness showed the opposite association. The same pattern was observed with conflict styles (Tangney et al., 1996) and eating disorders (Sanftner, Barlow, Marschall, & Tangney, 1995).

These results utilizing dispositional (i.e., proneness to) guilt provide an interesting contrast with research on state guilt. Some studies suggest that state guilt—guilt as experienced at one moment in time—is negatively associated with self-forgiveness for recalled offenses (e.g., Carpenter et al., 2014). This divergence is not uncommon across a wide array of outcomes; for example, state and trait guilt are differentially associated with perfectionism (Fedewa, Burns, & Gomez, 2005) and depression (Kim et al., 2011). Perhaps the simplest explanation is that in-the-moment guilt feelings may have acute, temporary effects not demonstrable at the broader trait level. Alternatively, the observed differences may be partly attributable to how guilt is operationalized. Specifically, the trait (Tangney et al., 2000) and social-cognition (Tracy & Robins, 2006) literatures operationalize guilt as behavior-focused negativity with an emphasis on appraisals (i.e., ‘the thing’ was bad rather than ‘the self’). By contrast, state measures often test for the presence of regretful feelings and experiences. Tangney and Dearing (2002) urged against

this latter approach, noting that an experience-focus rather than a behavior-focus may confound guilt with shame and rob the guilt construct of its beneficial characteristics (see also Kim et al., 2011; Tignor & Colvin, in press). Empirical research supports this notion; measures of state guilt tend to be equally or even more closely aligned with measures of trait *shame* than trait guilt (Fedewa et al., 2005; see also Fisher & Exline, 2006). Some have also reported acceptable psychometrics after collapsing state shame and guilt into one dimension (Hook et al., 2015). Interestingly, in one self-forgiveness study that explicitly manipulated the behavior/self distinction, Bassett et al. (2011) found the highest levels of state self-forgiveness in conditions emphasizing behavior-focused guilt states. Thus, one's definition of guilt may impact the quality of this relationship; however, when defined as a behavior-focused attributional and affective style, guilt-proneness appears to have some adaptive qualities for self-forgiveness.

4.1. Implications

The present results hold implications for self-forgiveness theory and practice. As noted by Fisher and Exline (2010), an ideal recommendation for clinical practice is to encourage guilt (promoting repair and apology) while seeking to minimize self-condemning shame. The present results contribute additional empirical support to these recommendations, and highlight specific avenues by which self-forgiveness may be promoted. Given that the adaptive characteristics of guilt-proneness appear to be motivational, these recommendations might be strengthened to include a specific focus on adaptive approach-and-repair behaviors. Identifying an optimally beneficial level of guilt may be important. Although the current research argues for the adaptiveness of guilt proneness, others have argued that excessive (i.e., clinically significant levels of) guilt may not be in one's best interests (Fisher & Exline, 2010). It should be noted that the conclusions reached here are specific to the present conceptualizations (behavior vs. self) of

guilt- and shame-proneness. As previously noted, some have used these terms differently to connote public humiliation versus private regret (Tangney & Dearing, 2002); the present findings may not generalize to such alternative meanings (Tignor & Colvin, in press).

It is worth noting that the construct of self-forgiveness is not without controversy. Some critics have expressed concern about self-forgiveness, suggesting that it may amount to self-excusing (e.g., Lamb, 2002). Others have noted that individuals may engage in self-deception as a means to reduce or avoid self-unforgiving reactions following transgressions, a process called “pseudo self-forgiveness” (Tangney et al., 2005). Tangney and colleagues (2005) specifically argued that pseudo self-forgiveness, as a trait, might be indicated by self-forgiveness that occurs among those who are disinclined to feel guilty over wrongdoings. Dispositional self-forgiveness in the present research did not appear to exist at the expense of guilt. Instead, the pattern of associations in the present research seemed to suggest that self-forgivers do feel guilty about their actions, yet that such tendencies were not associated with experienced difficulties in self-forgiveness. Framed differently, this pattern of results indicates a potential adaptive quality to trait self-forgiveness: those who were the most self-forgiving were those who felt bad about, yet repaired and approached, their wrongdoings.

The present results hold important methodological implications for the study of guilt- and shame-proneness. Specifically, they suggest that the GASP may be most useful when mechanisms of self-forgiveness (or related constructs) may be of interest, due to its subscales. By providing greater specificity, mediation or path-analytic approaches using the GASP may allow researchers better control in testing potential mediators at the trait level. Furthermore, the present results are consistent with the suggestion (Giner-Sorolla et al., 2011) that guilt-proneness may only be adaptive to the degree that it promotes approach and repair motivations. This is not to

say that the TOSCA is not useful as a “big picture” scale (i.e., assessing overall links between guilt and self-forgiveness or other constructs). Still, when mechanistic relationships are of interest, researchers would be advised to choose the GASP.

4.2. Limitations and Future Directions

The present research benefitted from a large sample from across the United States and generally supported predictions, including direct replication and convergence of results across shame- and guilt-proneness measures. Further, key findings were observed among both college and adult online samples. Still, the present research was not without limitations. First, both studies utilized self-report measures. Although this approach is consistent with much of the literature, the self-report nature of these data is a limitation as it relies on participants to provide information about their response tendencies. Future research could explore alternative ways to assess these relationships that do not rely on self-reports, such as behavioral observations or informant-report measures. A second limitation was that the data were cross-sectional and correlational, and thus our findings hold no implications for causality. Although our theorized directional relationships (i.e., appraisal before motivation) are consistent with models in both self-forgiveness (e.g., Hall & Fincham, 2005) and general motivation (Weiner, 1985), attempts to manipulate guilt and shame in ways that focus on the behavior/self distinction (e.g., behavior focus, self-focus) could be used to further test these relationships causally. Related to the previous point, we feel the field could benefit from the development of state shame and guilt scales that more directly map onto the guilt as behavioral violation (“I should have acted better”) and shame as self (“This makes me feel like an awful person”) distinction. Such measures would allow for better comparison and synthesis of empirical findings regarding state and trait guilt and shame.

We see other avenues for future research as well. For example, future research could examine the role of other affective and motivational processes in self-forgiveness. The general framework here (i.e., attributions and motivations) might be used to expand upon initial work linking self-forgiveness to a variety of traits such as perfectionism (e.g., Dixon, Earl, Lutz-Zois, Goodnight, & Peatee, 2014). Further, future research could seek to identify whether self-forgiveness may help to explain some of the potential benefits of guilt-proneness in areas such as mental health (Tangney, Wagner, & Gramzow, 1992) and transgression-related behavior (Tangney et al., 1996). Future studies could also seek to examine these relationships as they unfold in daily life, such as experience sampling designs. Finally, future research could expand on the current findings by further examining guilt-proneness' components with respect to other outcomes of interest beyond self-forgiveness. The adaptive aspects of guilt-proneness are well-documented in the literature (e.g., Tangney & Dearing, 2002; Woien et al., 2003), but few have decomposed guilt-proneness into motivational and appraisal components. As was observed here, motivational components may be central to understanding these relationships.

4.3. Conclusion

The present research examined the roles of guilt- and shame-proneness in self-forgiveness. In doing so, we found further evidence for the maladaptive nature of shame-proneness and provide a more nuanced view of the adaptive nature of guilt-proneness in the domain of self-forgiveness. Although guilt-prone individuals tended to be more self-forgiving overall, this appears to be largely a function of guilt's motivational tendencies. Nevertheless, our results suggest that a dispositional tendency to feel bad for offenses and being motivated to address them is an asset for adaptive traits such as self-forgiveness.

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[Per journal instructions, identifiers been removed for peer review. This page has been included with the file containing the title page and other identifiers]

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Table 1. *Descriptive statistics for Sample 1 variables*

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	α	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Self-Forgiveness	27.35	6.21	.81							
2. Guilt-Proneness ^a	44.83	6.34	.82	.23**						
3. Shame-Proneness ^a	33.95	7.53	.78	-.42***	.20*					
4. Guilt NBEs ^b	10.51	2.21	.69	.07	.62***	.10				
5. Guilt Repair ^b	10.77	1.98	.67	.20*	.55***	.03	.60***			
6. Shame NSEs ^b	10.65	2.33	.76	-.10	.50***	.55***	.54***	.45***		
7. Shame Withdrawal ^b	6.24	2.24	.69	-.37***	-.28***	.30***	-.06	-.19*	.07	
8. Apology Proneness	40.00	8.86	.89	.16*	.46***	-.12	.47***	.39***	.13	-.25**

Note. *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$. ^a Measured using the TOSCA-3 scale (Tangney et al., 20003). ^b Measured using the GASP scale (Cohen et al., 2011). Apology was scored such that higher values indicate greater apology to be consistent with the GASP repair scale.

Table 2. *Descriptive statistics for Sample 2 variables*

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	α	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Self-Forgiveness	29.16	7.22	.88							
2. Guilt-Proneness ^a	45.99	6.61	.84	.16***						
3. Shame-Proneness ^a	35.29	7.70	.78	-.43***	.25***					
4. Guilt NBEs ^b	21.43	5.14	.75	.06	.59***	.23***				
5. Guilt Repair ^b	21.99	4.36	.73	.18***	.62***	.14***	.63***			
6. Shame NSEs ^b	21.70	5.07	.79	-.19***	.47***	.50***	.62***	.54***		
7. Shame Withdrawal ^b	12.87	4.80	.65	-.27***	-.19***	.37***	.00	-.10*	.15***	
8. Conciliatory Beh.	40.61	7.08	.89	.30***	.66***	.10	.47***	.54***	.33***	-.25***

Note. *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$. ^a Measured using the TOSCA-3 scale (Tangney et al., 20003). ^b Measured using the GASP scale (Cohen et al., 2011).

Figure 1.

Figure 2.

Figure Captions

Figure 1. Predicted mediational patterns components of guilt- and shame-proneness.

Figure 2. Mediation analysis results from Samples 1 and 2. Coefficients in *italics* are from Sample 1; coefficients in **bold** are from Sample 2.